

HANDOUT 3.2: ATTRIBUTES OF A PARTICIPATORY APPROACH

Attributes of a Participatory Approach

Participatory approach: When those people who are directly affected by resource use are involved in decision making and managing the resource. For example, this would be the case if fisher people were involved in making decisions about rules that affected them.

Top-down approach: When people other than the resource users make decisions about managing resources and enforcing the rules. For example, this would be the case if government departments made all the decisions and rules about the resources.

Important points:

1. Participatory processes involve the community's participation in the information gathering exercise. The facilitator plays a key but very delicate role, and building trust is absolutely critical.
2. When scheduling participatory activities it is crucial to make the process as accessible as possible to as many people as possible. Scheduling can be a factor that either encourages or discourages participation and may introduce significant biases if it ends up, either by accident or design, excluding certain segments of the community. Scheduling refers to both the time of year that the activity takes place and the time of day.
3. It is crucial to maintain the community interest in the process.

Some of the potential benefits of participatory management styles are:

- Participatory and consultative democracy (those with a concerned interest in the resources have a voice, and are heard);
- Broader knowledge (information from the users should result in an improvement of management decisions);
- Better regulations (the more the regulations support the way the users themselves define their problems, the greater they will be accepted and supported);
- Increased legitimacy (the more users are involved in making decisions that affect them, the stronger their support for the management rules);
- Increased compliance (the involvement of users, couple with better regulations and increased legitimacy, will ultimately lead to greater adherence of the rules);
- Effective resource management (ultimately the above benefits will lead to a more equitable and efficient management arrangement);
- Adaptive management (co-management is flexible and allows for adjustments in activities as results are obtained and lessons are learned).

From a managers' perspective, specific benefits of participatory management styles may include:

- Lowering the costs of management (although co-management is costly to implement in the short-term, it is argued that in the long-term government costs are reduced. Enforcement costs would be reduced, for example, if legitimacy and compliance increased);
- Increasing their knowledge of the resource (through greater communication channels with the users);
- Building stronger relationships and trust with local communities and resource users (which will minimize conflict, violence and challenges to the managing authority);
- Increasing their chances of establishing a sustainable management strategy (those who are affected by the management arrangement are involved in making decisions and sharing the responsibility for management).

IMPORTANT NOTE

Although a specific project will likely be developed to implement a co-management arrangement, success will not be achieved in a two-three year period. It is an ongoing commitment from all stakeholders, particularly between resource users and government, even when a formal project ends. There will be many ups and downs that need to be weathered, and only with long term support from the partners will the benefits be realized.

Source: Francis, J., Johnstone, R., van't Hof, T., van Zwol, C. and Sadacharan, D. (editors). Training for the Sustainable Management of Marine Protected Areas: A Training Manual for MPA Managers. CZMC/WIOMSA. 120-122 pp.